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ABSTRACT

This fact sheet begins with an overview of family support programs, which includes a discussion of the premises of family support programs and the assumptions on which they are based, and a list of typical program components. The remainder of the fact sheet focuses on one type of family support program, family literacy programs. These programs seek to improve the literacy of the educationally disadvantaged family through efforts based in the home, center, school, library, or workplace. Family literacy programs are intended to serve the needs and concerns of the family as a unit; contain an educational component which formally or informally affects the child's literacy or development; contain an educational component for the adult; include at least one activity emphasizing the exchange of information between parent and child; and are based on community needs and participant recommendations. Most programs have components with child- and parent-specific goals, but the feature which distinguishes family literacy programs from other literacy programs is their provision for joint adult and child activities, such as side-by-side reading, modeling of child development practices, and field trips. Brief descriptions of five model literacy programs (the Renan Trust Family Literacy Model, Linking Home and School Through Workplace, Waterville Even Start, the American Library Association's Beginning with Books program, and Head Start's Parents' Reading Project) and five resource organizations are provided. (AC)

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Family Support Programs and Family Literacy

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Overview of Family Support Programs

Family support programs began to appear in the early 1970s and are now proliferating across the country. Initially established as small, grassroots, community-based programs, they are currently growing in number, size, and complexity. The National Resource Center for Family Support Programs has developed a series of Fact Sheets that provide introductions to eight different types of family support programs, addressing the issues of child abuse, family literacy, school readiness, school-linked services, alcohol and other drug abuse prevention, comprehensive collaborative services, and incarcerated parents.

PREMISES OF FAMILY SUPPORT

The influence of the family on a child cannot be overestimated. The family is a child's first source of information and the primary model for how a child experiences relationships. It helps a child begin to communicate and to learn personal and cultural values and beliefs. The family teaches a child ways to live in a complex world, and it provides a child with a sense of belonging and a foundation for self-esteem. Families, and specifically parents, who are confident and effective in these responsibilities are more likely to raise healthy and productive children.

Dramatic changes have occurred in the structure and patterns of family life in the U.S. over the past 20 years. The population has become increasingly mobile, and parents often function without help from extended family. Divorce rates have risen. Many children are born to unmarried mothers or raised in a single-parent household. Others are "latchkey" children whose parents work outside the home. Family support programs have emerged in response to these changes. The settings in which they operate vary widely, as do the types of services and resources they offer to families. But all programs are geared toward a common goal: increasing the ability of families to successfully nurture their children.

Family support programs emphasize a proactive approach toward the prevention of problems. To this end, they provide supports which can enhance effective functioning within the family, and they foster a sense of family self-sufficiency and empowerment. The structured incorporation of the family into all aspects of programs to enhance a child's development sets family support programs apart from other kinds of services for families.

All family support programs are based on the following assumptions:

- Families have primary responsibility for their children's development and well-being; they need resources and supports that will enable them to fulfill that responsibility effectively.
- Healthy families are the foundation of a healthy society. Families who are unable to promote their children's development ultimately place the entire society at risk.
- Families operate as part of a total system. Children cannot be viewed as separate from their families, nor can families be viewed separately from their communities, their cultural heritage or the society at large. Decisions made on behalf of children must consider the ways in which these various systems are interconnected.
- The systems and institutions upon which families rely for support must assist families' efforts to effectively raise their children. They must adjust and coordinate their services so as not to hinder families' abilities to maintain positive environments for their children.

TYPICAL PROGRAM COMPONENTS

Family support programs operate successfully in diverse communities and settings. Many are separate, free-standing, non-profit agencies; others are sponsored by churches, hospitals, schools, day care centers, or colleges and universities. Specific program content and structure are determined by the needs of the families being served, and are designed to complement already existing community services and resources. Most family support programs include the following:

- Life skills training. This may include family literacy, education, employment or vocational training, or enhancement of personal development skills such as a problem-solving, stress reduction, and communication.
- Parent information classes and support groups. These provide instruction in child development and opportunities for parents to share their experiences and concerns with peers.

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- Parent-child groups and family activities, which provide occasions for parents to spend more time with their children
- Drop-in time to provide parents with informal opportunities to spend time with staff members and other parents
- Information and referral services
- Crisis intervention/family counseling to respond to parents' special concerns about their children or specific family issues
- Auxiliary support services such as clothing exchanges, emergency food, transportation

ENCOURAGING FAMILY LITERACY

THE ISSUE OF FAMILY LITERACY

Parents, as a child's first and most important teachers, are uniquely qualified to pass on the richness of literacy. Unfortunately, too many parents are instead passing on the poverty of illiteracy. Today, more than 23 million adults in the United States are functionally illiterate. They cannot read, write, or perform basic math problems well enough to function effectively in everyday life. An additional 45 million are marginally illiterate, with skills at or below the ninth grade level. This legacy of illiteracy puts America's children at risk of greater impoverishment and undermines the economy's competitiveness.

According to recent research, the pattern of poor literacy skills is similar to the pattern of poverty in the United States.[1] Those who cannot read and those who are not economically self-sufficient are largely the same population. Furthermore, the educational level of parents is closely associated with child poverty. Poor children also face a greater risk of malnutrition, health problems, child abuse, educational disability, low achievement, and school dropout. Family literacy programs seek to change these intergenerational educational patterns, connecting early education for children and adult literacy instruction for parents, thereby creating literate families and helping to end the cycle of poverty.

The advantages of involving the family in the education of their children and ensuring the literacy of the entire family are substantial. Family literacy programs encourage parental involvement in the school systems. Because educational skills are transferable to the community and the workplace, a more productive community is created as well. Functional literacy does not guarantee economic self-sufficiency or full participation in one's community; however, without these skills, such accomplishments are nearly impossible.

COMPONENTS OF A FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM

There are several designs for family and intergenerational programs to improve the literacy of the educationally disadvantaged family: home-based, center-based, school-based, library-based, and work place-based. Program components include activities for children and adults, and family support. Family literacy programs are intergenerational, recruiting immediate or extended family members and spanning age groups. Families work together to promote mutual learning. Family literacy programs operate on the premise that "there is a synergy which occurs when the whole family, rather than individual members, becomes the target for literacy enhancement."[2]

A family literacy program is one which:

- Is conceptualized around the needs and concerns of the family, in contrast to serving individual family members in isolation;
- Contains an educational component which formally or informally affects the child's literacy or development;
- Contains an educational component for the adult, providing both literacy activities and parenting education to enable adults to attain proficiency in basic skills;
- Includes at least one activity emphasizing the exchange of knowledge and information between parent and child;
- Is developed based on community needs and participant recommendations.

[1] National Literacy Act of 1991, H.R. 751.

[2] Goodson, Swartz, and Millican (1988), as cited in Ruth S. Nickse, *Family and Intergenerational Literacy Programs: An Update of The Noises of Literacy*, 1990, p. 9. ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, Ohio.

Darling, Sharon. *Family Literacy and the Nation's Goals for Education.*

From these criteria, the following program components were identified:

Child Only: In a majority of programs, the goal is to enhance children's literacy skills; however, goals in other areas of development have been pursued. Activities include early childhood programs, day care, kindergarten programs, reading and storytelling events, and music and art activities.

Adult Only: Goals for adults aged 16 and above include developing literacy and parenting skills, and improving self-esteem. Services include Adult Basic Education (ABE), high school equivalency (GED preparation), English as a Second Language (ESL), and employment training.

Adult and Child: This component is the distinguishing feature of family literacy programs. Activities include side-by-side reading, modeling of child development practices, reading aloud, storytelling, educational field trips, and computer games.

Family Support: This component targets the family's utilization of community resources, the development of social networks, the development of parenting skills, and the economic self-sufficiency of the family.

FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM MODELS

MODEL 1: THE KENAN TRUST FAMILY LITERACY MODEL

The Kenan Project's "family intervention" model is based on the Parent and Child Education Program (PACE), developed and funded by the State of Kentucky in 1985. In 1988, after PACE had achieved national attention for its literacy efforts, the William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust provided a grant to establish model family literacy programs in Kentucky and North Carolina, which would improve on the original PACE family literacy model. Today, the Kenan Trust Family Literacy Model differs from PACE in its emphasis upon extensive parent and child time together, its mandatory parent volunteerism at local schools, and its career education component.

The Kenan program strives to break the cycle of illiteracy by combining early childhood education with efforts to improve

the literacy of undereducated adults. By having parent and child attend school in the same building and at the same time, the Kenan Model seeks to improve parents' attitudes toward education, to increase the learning skills of children, to teach parents various childcare skills, and to provide role models for parents and children. It also assists parents with vocational training, career counseling, and employability skills instruction.

There are four components of the Kenan program. The early childhood component fosters the intellectual skills of the preschool child. The adult education component is highly individualized. The parenting education component allows the parents to work with their children's teachers to design interpersonal programs of interest and to assist the adults in developing parenting skills. The vocational component requires the adults to perform volunteer service within the school as a tutor, storyteller, or as a library or kindergarten aide. In addition, the program provides opportunities for parents of widely varying skills to assist each other and to build a community.

MODEL 2: LINKING HOME AND SCHOOL THROUGH WORKPLACE

Currently underway at 31 sites in 25 states across the country, Linking Home and School Through Workplace (LHSTW) has been active in promoting family literacy since 1988. Sponsored by Work in America, Inc., LHSTW began its first on-site pilot program in 1990.

LHSTW targets employees with children preschool through junior high. The organization's goals are: to assist employees in teaching their children basic skills; to strengthen parent and child relationships; to introduce employees to workplace education and to offer basic skills courses; to educate the next generation of employees; and to institutionalize the concept of education in the workplace.

The LHSTW program emphasizes the family unit as the most effective catalyst for learning. Family Science, Critical Television Watching, and Parents Question and Answer Tips were designed to promote intergenerational learning and parenting skills while fostering education and communication. Family Reading teaches parents how to read aloud to children and how to select books. At the workplace, parents are taught activities they can bring home and share with their children.

Recently, LHSTW has established a Literacy Network of 31 companies and unions which meets semiannually to discuss innovations in family literacy programs and literacy programs in the workplace.

MODEL 3: WATERVILLE EVEN START

Federally-funded and state-administered, the Even Start program provides four-year discretionary grants for cooperative projects that build on existing community resources to create a new range of family-focused services. The Even Start Act encourages partnerships among providers and calls for parental involvement in the planning and design of programs, childcare and transportation services, home- and center-based programs, and scheduling convenience for families.

Chosen as one of the country's in-depth sites for the Even Start national evaluation, the Waterville Even Start project has all the elements that make a successful family literacy program. Even Start combines an adult education component, a parent and child interaction component, a parenting component, it also links the home to school, community, and other programs within the area. Even Start emphasizes the integration of these components into a comprehensive program serving the needs of the family. All instruction occurs in the home and is centered around an individualized curriculum; parenting education is incorporated into all phases of instruction.

The program also includes monthly pot luck suppers organized by parents, enabling parents and children to meet and support each other. There is a parents' meeting once a month. Guest speakers are invited to lead workshops on topics such as parenting, self-esteem, CPR, and first aid. The Even Start project provides transportation to meetings and pot-lucks, and reimbursement for childcare when needed.

MODEL 4: AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION— BEGINNING WITH BOOKS

According to the American Library Association, libraries and family literacy have a "natural connection." The library is a focal point for family literacy because as an information and service organization, it offers literacy materials, instruction, and support services. The ALA joined forces with the Bell Atlantic Corporation in 1990 to provide grants to public libraries in the mid-Atlantic region, establishing library-based family literacy programs and a national clearinghouse on family literacy.

Beginning with Books is a nationally-recognized family literacy program founded in 1984 and affiliated with The Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. It promotes family literacy through a variety of programs including The Gift Book Program, Read Together, Read-Aloud Parent Clubs, and Project Beacon.

In The Gift Book Program, low-income parents of young children receive quality paperbacks through agencies including Head Start programs, drug and child-abuse agencies, food banks, homeless shelters, and well-baby clinics. Parents are encouraged to read to their children every day and are invited to visit the library for other free books. This program reaches over 6,000 families a year.

The Read Together project recruits volunteers to read one-on-one to children and to supervise other creative activities while parents get literacy tutoring from the Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council. Parents also learn about reading to children. Children receive three gift books during the year, and both parents and children are assisted in library usage.

The goals of the Read-Aloud Parent Club program are: (1) to help parents become more skillful and confident in reading to their children; (2) to encourage daily reading-aloud and regular library visits; (3) to stimulate children's literacy development through family literacy. Parents meet weekly, receive free books, and are invited to take out library cards and borrow books. Childcare is provided; in some cases, meetings end with parent/child time. Clubs have been established for Head Start parents, residents of public housing, and kindergarten Chapter I parents.

Project Beacon is an outreach program which provides children's books and in-service training on emergent literacy to family day-care homes, day-care centers, and parents in low-income neighborhoods.

MODEL 5: HEAD START—PARENTS' READING PROJECT

A community-based program like Head Start can play an active role in addressing family literacy due to its fine reputation in the communities it serves, its ability to recruit, support, and retain adult learners, its operating principles of parent involvement and empowerment, its commitment to working with families, and its holistic approach to child development.

Head Start's Family Literacy Initiative's main goal is to offer a family literacy program to every Head Start grantee. The objectives of Head Start's Family Literacy Initiative are: (1) to enable Head Start parents to develop and use literacy skills which enable them to become more active

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and effective participants in the community, in the workplace, in their child's education and development, and in their efforts to obtain economic and social self-sufficiency; and (2) to enhance each child's literacy development by helping parents become more effective as their child's "first teachers."

One such Head Start program is the Parents' Reading Project, in Wisconsin. The project's literacy assistant serves 35 families by supporting parents' involvement in a library-sponsored literacy program and encouraging parent-and-child interactions which promote literacy. A lending library of tape-recorded books is a popular resource.

Resource Organizations

The National Resource Center for Family Support Programs (NRC/FSP)

Family Resource Coalition
200 S. Michigan Avenue, Suite 15
Chicago, IL 60604
312/341-0900 FAX 312/341-9361

The National Resource Center for Family Support Programs (NRC/FSP) was established to assure the availability of current knowledge in the field of family support on the design, development, and implementation of family support programs.

The NRC/FSP operates a computerized database to document and disseminate information on exemplary and innovative family support programs across the country.

The Center identifies and develops resource materials for policymakers and practitioners (such as program descriptions, bibliographies, program development manuals, training curricula and monographs), and provides technical assistance, training, and consulting in family support program design and operations.

The American Library Association

Public Information Office
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, IL 60611
312/944-6780 or 1-800-545-2433

The American Library Association (ALA) is the oldest and largest library association in the world and has been active in promoting literacy and education since 1876. Its 53,000 members represent all types of libraries: state, public, academic, military, government, hospital, prison, and more. The ALA's main purpose is to achieve and maintain high-quality library and information services. Through its Office for Library Outreach Services, the ALA has promoted library literacy programs at the federal, state, and local levels.

The list of ALA services is extensive and includes: legislating for federal support to libraries; defending intellectual freedom by asserting libraries' rights to shelve and circulate diverse materials; publishing journals and monographs; reviewing, evaluating, and accrediting graduate programs of library education; encouraging public use of libraries through public service advertising and graphics; promoting library services to the rural poor, ethnic minorities, illiterates, and others; participating in library education and professional development; assisting in research projects; preserving library materials; recognizing and rewarding excellence (e.g., the Newbery and Caldecott awards for children's literature); and sponsoring national conferences.

The National Center for Family Literacy

1 Riverfront Plaza, Suite 608
Louisville, KY 40202
502/584-1133 FAX 502/584-0172

The National Center for Family Literacy is a private, not-for-profit corporation established in 1989. The Center's goal is to break the intergenerational cycle of family illiteracy by providing training which integrates adult literacy, early childhood education, and family intervention techniques into literacy programs planning to adopt the Kenan Model for Family Literacy.

The functions of the Center can be divided into three broad areas: promoting awareness of the cyclical, inter-generational effects of illiteracy through seminars and printed information; research and demonstration; and providing technical assistance, training, information, and materials to family literacy organizations.

The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy

1002 Wisconsin Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20007
202/338-2006

The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy was established in March, 1989. The Foundation's mission is to support the development of family literacy programs, to break the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy, and to establish literacy as a value in every family in America.

The Foundation accomplishes this by identifying successful literacy programs, awarding grants for excellence, providing seed money for community planning of interagency family literacy programs, encouraging recognition of literacy educators, volunteers, students, and programs, and by publishing and distributing literature documenting effective literacy programs in operation.

International Reading Association

800 Barksdale Road, P.O. Box 8139
Newark, DE 19714-8139
302/731-1600

The International Reading Association is a nonprofit educational membership organization established in 1956. The association has grown to more than 93,000 members in 90 countries around the world. The IRA's goals are to improve the quality of reading instruction through the study of the reading process and teaching techniques; to serve as a clearinghouse for the dissemination of reading research through conferences, journals, and other publications; to increase literacy levels worldwide; and to actively encourage and support lifelong reading habits.

IRA encourages parents to become involved in their children's education through reading activities and supports intergenerational family literacy projects. These family literacy projects include:

- IRA's Family Literacy Commission, formed to heighten awareness about family literacy and to study family literacy projects worldwide.
- Family Focus: Reading and Learning Together, developed as a model program to help families learn new ways to foster good reading habits and to improve reading skills through the use of the newspaper.
- IRA's special interest groups. Adult Literacy, Aging and Intergenerational Reading, and Parental Involvement provide forums for sharing information about specific areas of interest among reading professionals.

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